

Deep in the Heart of Texas

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A Barbeque Spiced With Politics

By David S. Broder

SAN ANTONIO—The scene was right out of Edna Ferber's "Giant." The flagstone ranch house was ablaze with light. The magnificent live oaks in the yard were hung with pots of orange mums, swaying in the evening breeze; more flowers floated in the pool, and the sweet scent of the prairie grass mingled with the odors of the steaming barbecue.

The guests arrived Texas-style, setting their executive jets down on the Picoso Ranch airstrip, with the great red Santa Gertrudis cattle watching. Nearby, two cowhands sat astride their perfectly groomed horses, posed against the last rays of the sun, as if by a photographer.

But not even a novelist would have dared concoct the guest list that was present Sunday night when President Nixon visited John Connally's Floresville Ranch, just south of here. As Neal Peirce says in his

The time is ripe for a new romance, and Richard Nixon knows it. As one watched that picture book scene under the trees Sunday, the ladies in their long dresses, the men in tailored ranch suits and cowboy boots, the strolling Mexican Mariachi band, and the black waiters passing drinks, the realization dawned: It's happening; it's really being consummated right here.

Our President moved easily in this group, the grocer's son who rose to the heights of political power feeling right at home among the millionaires, many of whom are also self-made men.

After supper, he answered their questions for more than an hour, never hitting a false note. He told them exactly what they wanted to hear. He praised their friend and host and hero John Connally, who saved the state government from a serious liberal challenger in 1962 and gave them six years more



new book, "The Megastates of America," "The political life of Texas is directed by a single, moneyed Establishment. There is no other state of the union where the control is so direct, unambiguous and commonly accepted."

Connally, the Democratic former governor, is as Pierce says, "The epitome of the Establishment," and his guest list was a directory of its members.

For years, there has been speculation and anticipation of the political realignment that would bring the wealth and power of the Texas Democratic Establishment into firm alliance with a conservative Republican president.

Once before, in the 1950's, the marriage seemed on the verge of consummation. Governor Allen Shivers (Democrat) led the Democratic Party into support of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952.

But the Eisenhower-era Republican romance with the Texas Democratic Establishment was broken up by the ambitions of Lyndon B. Johnson, who carried his state in 1960, 1964 and 1968.

But Johnson is old and ailing now; the state Democratic leadership is tainted by scandal and wracked by division; and the national party is veering off in dangerous directions; talking of nominating a George McGovern with his unacceptable views on oil depletion, capital gains and the Communist menace.



of freedom from corporate income taxes or real utility regulation; the President called Connally a man "capable of holding any job in the United States."

He told them that American bombing of North and South Vietnam would continue until Communist aggression has been defeated and they were moved to toast "the courage of the President of the United States."

He said that Washington was full of doubters, the victims of "intellectual incest," but that the country was strong and confident and that if they would stand with him "against the trend toward permissiveness, the trend toward weakness," America would be itself again.

He told them that "rather than moving in the direction of reducing the depletion allowance, the government should do more to provide incentive . . . for people to go out and explore for oil."

He noted pointedly that his adviser on tax reform was sitting at his right—John Connally.

And having said that, he quickly added that he was concerned that too many people were getting the idea this was a "something-for-nothing" economy. If there was irony in the juxtaposition, the President did not note it.

Look at all the want ads, he told the bankers and publishers and oilmen, and ask yourselves why there are millions unemployed and millions on welfare when jobs are going begging. It is because too many people have forgotten that "no job is menial if it provides bread on the table and shelter for a family. . . . It is that spirit we need revived," the President said.

It was late now, and the jets would have to take off, returning their owners to Houston and Dallas. But there was one more topic that might serve to foster the romance a bit further, so Connally himself asked the President if he might, perhaps, have any thoughts on busing.

The President did, and those too went down as easily as bordeaux and champagne Connally had served. At the end, when one of the publishers said he'd like "as a newspaper man," to say the traditional, "thank you, Mr. President," it was hard not to believe that a transaction of some significance had occurred. The Picos Ranch barbecue just might make political history.